FWF Austrian Science Fund

In accordance with its Funding Guidelines (as amended), the FWF has issued the following Application Guidelines for

ESPRIT

effective as of July 1, 2023, version 4

Discovering what matters.

Contents

Please note: Key terms used in these Application Guidelines are explained in the document
Definition of Terms.

1   General information

This document has been prepared in German and English for your convenience. In the event of a dispute, the German version shall prevail.

1.1   Program objective

The ESPRIT (Early-Stage Program: Research, Innovation, Training) aims to foster the career development of researchers from all disciplines at the beginning of their academic career who wish to carry out an independent research project at an Austrian research institute. The principal investigator will be supported in their skills and career development by a mentor.

The objectives of ESPRIT are
- to promote excellent, innovative research,
- to retain, attract, and win back outstanding researchers and thus strengthen Austrian research institutes,
- to support outstanding women researchers,
- to promote career and skills development (develop/establish own research profile based on an independent research project),
- to enhance career prospects (boost competitiveness through publications, collaborations, and increased visibility).

The FWF places particular emphasis on the promotion of women: female ESPRIT principal investigators benefit from additional measures for women for the purpose, among others, of improving the visibility of successful women researchers and their networking, as well as from the provision of child allowances, if applicable, as additional funding. Furthermore, the FWF aims to award at least half of the projects in the program to female principal investigators (see section 3.4).

1.2   What types of projects can be funded?

Funding may be requested for projects in basic research that are clearly defined, innovative, with plausibly described objectives and methods, and are limited in duration. Funding may also be requested for projects in the field of clinical research that are clearly defined in terms of objectives and methods, limited in time and budget, and the results of which are not connected with any direct commercial interests. For the requirements on clinical projects and specific standards regarding the content of the project description, see the information on the Program Clinical Research and the Application Guidelines for the Program Clinical Research. In this case, a positive opinion from the relevant ethics commission or evidence of a fundamental approval/endorsement by that commission must also be attached.

Proposals featuring one or more of the following attributes are considered innovative basic research: (i) research on new ideas and/or an investigation of new research questions, (ii) the development or application of new research methods, new technologies, or original approaches to solving research questions, or (iii) the application or modification of existing methods, technologies, or approaches to new research questions. Please note that next

logical steps or the incremental further development of published data is not considered to be innovative or original.

Principal investigators should be free to choose the fields of research, but the suitability of the applying research institution for the implementation of the planned research project should play a key role in their decision. The project must contribute to the principal investigator developing an independent research profile. In addition to the project description, a career and mentoring plan is required.

The **duration of funding** is **36 months**. Multiple funding is not permitted (see FWF Funding Guidelines).

1.3   Submission

There are no submission deadlines for this program; applications can be submitted at any time. All proposals must be submitted online using the elane digital application portal. Project funding is administered through the research institutions (PROFI); this means the application must be approved for submission by both the applicant and the respective research institution (= lead research institution).[1] All forms required for the application must be completed online; other required documents such as the project description incl. annexes and any additional documents must be uploaded in full before the application can be approved for submission by the research institution. For additional information, please see the elane user manual.

1.3.1   Who is eligible to apply?

All Austrian **research institutions** are eligible to apply[2]. The project must be carried out in Austria under the auspices of the Austrian lead research institution at which the principal investigator will be employed. Project-related stays abroad, for instance, for field research, can be scheduled and must be included in the project description. Applications are submitted by the research institution where the project is to be carried out. The research institution must provide the necessary infrastructure.

The ESPRIT program is addressed to highly qualified postdocs of all disciplines from Austria and abroad at the beginning of their academic career (see also the requirements in section 1.4.1). Since the funding of female researchers is an explicit goal of this program, the research institutions are urged to especially encourage highly qualified women to apply for funding. Upon approval, the principal investigators are employed at the research institution that submitted the application; the principal investigator's salary is funded through the project.

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[1]   Approval for submission by the research institution may be waived by the research institution if it has authorized the applicant to approve it themselves.

[2]   Research institutions must be registered in the FWF's research institution portal.

The following **exclusion criteria** apply for principal investigators:

- Persons who at the time of submitting the application already have a position at the applying research institution that includes the prospect of permanent employment upon fulfilment of a qualification agreement (e.g., tenure track position) or a permanent contract of employment in a research position cannot serve as the principal investigator of an ESPRIT application unless the employment contract is linked to third-party funding.

- Researchers who have already completed a habilitation also cannot serve as the principal investigator of an ESPRIT project.

In the ESPRIT program, researchers can serve only once as principal investigator.

An ESPRIT project requires the commitment on the part of a researcher working in Austria to act as **mentor** to support the career development of the principal investigator (see also section 1.4.6 and section 1.4.7).

1.3.2   Can multiple applications be submitted simultaneously?

There is no limit to the number of applications that can be submitted by a **research institution**.

The following restrictions apply for **principal investigators** with regard to ESPRIT applications/projects and other simultaneous applications/projects:

- It is not possible for one person to serve as the principal investigator in several ESPRIT projects/applications.

- It is also not possible to submit parallel applications in other FWF career programs (Erwin Schrödinger, Elise Richter, or Elise Richter PEEK, FWF ASTRA Awards).

- Please note that the number of ongoing/approved projects is limited for principal investigators in the ESPRIT program.

For further information on restrictions concerning the permissible number of applications and ongoing projects, please see Restriction on the number of projects.

The principal investigators of an ESPRIT application can apply simultaneously to other organizations for funding for the planned research project; however, they are required to inform the FWF immediately in writing both of applications submitted to other funding institutions as well as the decisions made on these applications. The decision-making body in the FWF will decide whether and to what extent this third-party funding will be deducted from the funding through the ESPRIT program. If substantially identical applications are approved by other national and international funding organizations, and the approved funding is sufficient to carry out the planned research project, the principal investigator must decide on one of the approved funding grants. It is not possible to combine them.

1.4 What are the requirements for applicants?

1.4.1 General requirements

The doctoral degree of principal investigators must have been awarded no more than five years at the time of application (approval and submission of the application by the research institution). This period is calculated based on the date of the candidate's successful thesis defense exam. For degrees without a thesis defense exam, the date the candidate's dissertation was officially accepted applies. Submission is possible before the doctoral degree is completed if the other application requirements are met, and if it appears that the principal investigator will receive the doctoral degree within the expected processing time (approximately 4-6 months).

In addition, the principal investigator's publication record over the last five years must be internationally visible and commensurate with the expected career path in their field. The following criteria are decisive for assessing the publication record and initiation of the review process:

- **Quality assurance:** Most relevant in assessing the applicant's publication record are those publications that have been subject to a quality assurance procedure in line with international standards (peer review or an equivalent procedure; in the natural and life sciences, peer review is expected). Journals must usually be listed in Web of Science, Scopus, or the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). For journals not listed in those databases, or for monographs, edited volumes, contributions to edited volumes, or other publication types, the applicant must provide a link to the publisher's website which contains a description of the applicable quality assurance procedure. Should no such description be available on the website, it is the applicant's responsibility to provide evidence that the publication has been subject to a quality assurance procedure in accordance with the standards of the field.

- **International visibility:** The majority of the applicant's publications must have a wider than national reach. In the natural sciences, life sciences, and social sciences, most of the publications listed must be in English.

- **Number/scope and quality** of the publications must be commensurate with the researcher's expectable career path and the respective discipline. At least two publications must be quality-assured and internationally visible publications with a substantial and independent contribution by the applicant. At least one publication with first, last, or corresponding authorship is required, with the exception of publications in journals (or disciplines) that rank authors alphabetically. If any such publications are included in the required document *PI_publication.pdf* (see section 2.2.4), the applicant's contribution must be specified.

If there is any uncertainty about general application requirements or about accounting for career interruptions (see sections 1.4.3 and 1.4.4), the FWF recommends contacting the FWF Office or the FWF Equal Opportunities and Diversity in Research Funding unit in research funding in good time before submitting the application to confirm that all

requirements are met and that any career interruptions can be accounted for. In cases of doubt, the appropriate decision-making bodies of the FWF shall decide on applicants' eligibility.

1.4.2   Equal opportunities, diversity, and inclusion

The FWF Strategy for Equal Opportunities and Diversity of Researchers applies. This means that breaks or delays in applicants' research careers that have led to publication gaps, unorthodox career paths, or limited international research experience can be accounted for. For further details on accounting for career breaks, please refer to the information sheet on career interruptions.

1.4.3   Consideration of career breaks

The FWF will take justified, documentable career breaks (e.g. due to pregnancy, childcare,[3] caregiving obligations,[4] military or civilian service, flight, and asylum) into consideration in assessing the principal investigator's eligibility to apply.

1.4.4   Inclusion of the disabled and chronically ill

The FWF will also take any exceptions to and interruptions of typical career paths due to disability and/or long-term illness into consideration in determining whether the principal investigator meets the application requirements.

1.4.5   Data protection notice

When assessing eligibility, all personal data provided to the FWF by an applicant on a voluntary basis that relates to the information provided in sections 1.4.3 and 1.4.4 shall be taken into account exclusively to the applicant's benefit (compensation of disadvantages). Relevant information (without sensitive or personal data) can be included in an individual's academic CV, making it available to the reviewers. A general explanation, including the duration of the interruption or delay, is sufficient. Please use the required form and give your explicit consent to data processing on the last page. If you wish to submit further supporting documents in addition to those listed in the form, please submit them directly to the FWF Office. These will not be visible to your research institution. All information provided in this regard is used solely to check the application requirements and is not made available to reviewers.

Relevant information, without sensitive or personal data, can also be included in an individual's CV, making it available to the reviewers. A general explanation, including the duration of the interruption or delay, is sufficient.

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3   Childcare includes parental leave periods, if applicable.

4   Immediate family members and/or persons living in the same household: Spouses, registered partners, parents, children, adopted, step, and foster children, siblings, parents-in-law, and children-in-law.

1.4.6 Requirements for the mentor (mentor profile)

The mentor must be an experienced, active researcher who is prepared to advise and support the principal investigator with regard to their long-term career development through the regular performance of their mentoring duties. The mentor does not have to work in the exact same field as the principal investigator, but the fields must be closely enough related that the mentor is familiar with the international and national context and the structures in the principal investigator's field. In the interests of career development, the mentor should not have been the previous supervisor of the principal investigator's master thesis, diploma thesis, or dissertation.

The mentor must be employed at least 20% at an Austrian research institution.

1.4.7 Mentoring duties

The mentor agrees to assist the principal investigator in their professional and personal career development. As such, the mentor agrees to perform the following mentoring duties:
- Assist in the development of an independent research profile,
- Assist in carrying out the project / research work,
- Assist in building networks and collaborations,
- Assist in integrating the principal investigator into the applying research institute,
- Provide strategic assistance in the principal investigator's further career planning and in defining and pursuing goals.

In addition to the mentor, other persons can take on mentoring duties which offers the benefit of a wider range of expertise (see also section 2.2.3: Annex 3: Career and mentoring plan).

1.5 What types of funding can be requested?

1.5.1 Principal investigator's salary

The ESPRIT program provides for the full-time employment of the principal investigator.[5] To cover the personnel costs of the principal investigator for the three year duration of the project, funding should be requested for a **senior postdoc salary** in accordance with the FWF Personnel Costs and Salary Rates — FWF for PROFI projects, including a fixed percentage increase for the subsequent year to compensate for wage rises.

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[5] As the ESPRIT program is primarily designed to support the principal investigator and fund their own position, a 100% employment contract for the principal investigator must be requested for the entire duration of the project. If a fixed-term employment relationship exists at the time of application, the principal investigator must either withdraw from this before beginning the ESPRIT project or take a leave of absence from this position for the duration of the project.

1.5.2 Project-specific costs

In addition to the principal investigator's salary, a lump sum of €45,000 is approved to cover further project-specific costs (i.e., additional personnel costs such as personnel and non-personnel costs that are needed to carry out the project and that are not included in the infrastructure provided by the research institution). The FWF does not finance the infrastructure or basic equipment of research institutions.

Of these project-specific funds, up to €6,000 can be used for coaching and/or professional development.

If additional funds that exceed the lump sum approved for project-specific costs are needed to carry out the project, a total of up to €75,000 can be requested by including a relevant justification in the project description. In this case, the total amount of requested funds must be broken down into the appropriate cost categories in the project description (see also section 2.3).

1.5.3 Publication costs

Publication costs cannot be requested as part of the application process. Information on funding options for publications resulting from the proposed research can be found on the FWF website under the Communication portfolio.

1.5.4 Child allowance

Female principal investigators who are employed full time after the birth of a child can receive a child allowance in the amount of €9,600 per child per year (= gross salary including all employer and employee taxes; paid out 12 times a year) up until the child's third birthday. The principal investigator can request the relevant funds at the time of concluding the funding agreement for an approved ESPRIT project or, in the case of an ongoing project, submit an additional application.

2 Application

2.1 Sections of the application

A complete application must include the following sections:

2.1.1 Academic abstract

The academic abstract must be written in English, may not exceed 3,000 characters (including spaces, no formulas or special characters), and is used to inform potential reviewers about the project. The abstract must use the English headings provided below and be entered into the elane form provided for this purpose.

- Wider research context / theoretical framework
- Hypotheses / research questions / objectives
- Approach / methods
- Level of originality / innovation
- Primary researchers involved

Where alternatives are indicated between slashes, please select the alternative that applies to your project. Besides the principal investigator, mentors must also be mentioned in the section on the primary researchers involved.

2.1.2 Project description

Project descriptions are limited to 20 consecutively numbered pages, including the table of contents (required), and where applicable, a list of abbreviations, headings, figures, captions, tables, footnotes, etc.

The project description must also include the Annexes 1-3 and if applicable 4 on additional pages:
- Annex 1: List of literature cited in the application (*References*), max. 5 pages
- Annex 2: Academic CVs and description of previous research achievements of the principal investigator and the mentor (max. 3 pages per CV)
- Annex 3: Career and mentoring plan (max. 3 pages)
- Annex 4 (optional): Collaboration letters from national and international cooperation partners (max. 1 page per letter)

The project description, including these annexes, must be uploaded as a single file titled *Proposal.pdf*. The FWF will send this document to the reviewers.

2.1.3 Additional documents

- Required:

  - Two publications written by the applicant must be named, documenting that the applicant fulfills the general requirements to act as principal investigator (publication record, see section 1.4.1); for internal FWF use only

  - Publication lists for internal FWF use to assess principal investigator's eligibility to apply and to check for conflicts of interest with potential reviewers (see section 2.2.4).

- Where applicable:

  - Results or final project report: If the project submitted is the continuation of an FWF-funded project (follow-up application), a report on previous results or a final project report and a list of publications resulting from the project must be uploaded in the language of the application (max. 6 pages).

- Additional documents in the case of resubmission: If the application is a revised version of a previously rejected application (see section 2.4), a response to the reviews and an overview of all changes made in the resubmitted application (*Overview_revision*) must be uploaded.

- Cover letter accompanying the application (optional)

- List of max. 3 researchers (optional) - including, if applicable, reviewers of a rejected proposal - who are to be excluded from the review process (see section 3.2), with a brief justification

Any additional documents (e.g., recommendations on potential reviewers, letters of recommendation, forthcoming publications) will not be considered in further stages of the application process.

2.1.4 Forms to be completed

- Required: *Research institute assignment* form, *Contact* form, *Application* form, *Program-specific data* form, *Cost breakdown* form, *Academic abstract* form and *Co-authors* form
- Where applicable: *Other collaboration* form

2.2 Application content and format

2.2.1 Language of application

To allow applications to be reviewed by international experts, applications must be submitted in English. If desired, a version in German or another language may be added as a supplement. Submission solely in German or another specialist language other than English is only permitted in exceptional cases. Such exceptions apply exclusively to applications from the fields of linguistic and literary studies involving only texts in German or languages other than English. In all such cases, it is absolutely necessary to consult the project officers in the FWF Strategy – Career Development department prior to application. An academic abstract for the project as well as a brief yet convincing statement explaining why submission in a language other than English is justified for substantive academic reasons will be required. The final decision shall be made by the relevant decision-making bodies of the FWF.

2.2.2 Project description: Scope and formatting requirements

The project description may not exceed 20 pages. It must contain a table of contents with page numbers. Desired components such as a list of abbreviations, figures, captions, tables, footnotes, etc. are to be included in the 20-page limit.

The continuous text in the project description, Annexes 1-3, the publication lists, and the additional documents specified in section 2.1.3 where applicable, must be written, without exception, in 11 pt. font with 1.5 line (15-20 pt.) spacing and at least 2 cm margins. A standard, easily legible font must be used for the body text. The formatting requirements

(font type and size, line spacing, and margins) of the project description also apply for the additional files, except for documents not prepared by the applicant, such as collaboration letters.

Citations in the text and the list of works cited (*References*) in the application must be in line with the conventions of the respective discipline, preferably according to a widely used style guide (e.g*., Chicago Manual of Style, APA Publication Manual*). The choice of citation conventions or style guide is up to the applicant, but must be implemented consistently throughout the application. If available, a DOI address (DOI = Digital Object Identifier) or another persistent identifier should be provided for the literature cited.

2.2.3 Project description and annexes

The project description may not exceed 20 pages and must include a table of contents as well as the following sections, each designated by headings:

(1)   Table of contents

(2)   State of the art of the relevant international research (including own preliminary work, if applicable) and relation of the project to this context

(3)   Clearly defined aims and hypothesis/hypotheses or research question(s) of the project

(4)   Description of the project's anticipated level of originality or scientific/scholarly innovation

(5)   Methods

(6)   Work plan and timeline

(7)   National and/or international collaboration partners (if applicable): Please specify the intended collaboration partners and the subject of the intended collaboration(s) or the planned contribution to the project. In addition to any legal regulations, FWF's own regulations on international collaborations also apply (see the FWF website for more information).

   All national and/or international cooperation arrangements named in the project description must be listed on the *Other cooperation* form (one form must be completed for each cooperation partner). Cooperation partners named in the project description and who contribute significantly to the research project may be confirmed by a collaboration letter.

(8)   Research-related qualifications of the researchers involved

(9)   All potential ethical, safety-related, or regulatory aspects[6] of the proposal and how applicants plan to deal with them must be described in this section. These questions should be addressed briefly in the text even if the applicant believes the project does not raise any such issues.

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[6]   For instance, the European Commission's *Ethics for Researchers* or *The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* can serve as a guide here.

(10) Any potential sex-specific and gender-related aspects[7] of the proposal must be detailed. To what extent are sex-specific and gender-related aspects considered in the proposal? How will they be integrated into the research approach? These questions must be briefly addressed, even if the applicant does not feel that the project involves any such aspects.

(11) Information on the suitability of the research institute for implementing the planned project and the project's contribution to enhancing the research institute.

(12) If more than the lump sum of €45,000 in project-specific costs is requested (see section 1.5.2), this must be justified briefly in a way that the reviewers find clear and understandable.

Annex 1: List of literature cited in the application (*References*) on no more than 5 pages

Annex 2: CVs and description of previous research achievements

The academic CVs and research achievements for the principal investigator and the mentor must be described on no more than 3 pages per person. Please note that according to the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment, metrics such as journal impact factors, Article Influence Scores, h-index and the like may not be listed on academic CVs.

Academic CVs must be structured as follows:

- *Personal details:* Personal details (name, researcher unique identifier(s) such as ORCID, research ID, etc., *no* photos), address of research institute and relevant websites. In addition, it is required to provide a publicly accessible link to the list of all published publications.

- *Education:* List of academic milestones with date, type, subject, and research institute of each degree.

- *Position(s):* List of academically relevant positions (with the extent of employment in the case of part-time employment).

- *Career breaks:* List of career breaks or delays (see also section 1.4.3).

- *Net research experience* (only required for CV of principal investigator): based on the previous information, the length of time (in years and months) that has actually been used in net total for research – calculated in such a way as to be equivalent to full-time employment – and broken down into the time before and after completion of the doctoral degree. This is intended to make it easier for the reviewers to assess the principal investigator's qualifications in term of academic age.

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[7] Positioning and thoughts on the research approaches in the project in terms of sex-specific and gender-related aspects could include: Is the research approach likely to produce sex-specific and gender-related findings? If so, what findings? How and where are these integrated into the research approach? (For information on determining the relevance of sex-specific and gender-related issues, please see the FWF website.

- *Research interests*: Description of the main areas of research and the most important research results achieved to date.

- *Mentoring and supervision experience* (only required for CV of mentor): Description of previous experience as mentor with regard to mentees, completed programs, career development measures, equal opportunities, gender awareness and competence, etc.

- *Academic publications*: List of no more than ten of the most important published or accepted academic publications (journal articles, monographs, edited volumes, contributions to edited volumes, proceedings, etc.); for each publication, either a [DOI address](#) or another [persistent identifier](#) should be indicated, if available.

- *Additional research achievements*: List of no more than ten of the most important research achievements apart from academic publications. Please note that research achievements should be presented individually (e.g., one project = one research achievement, two projects = two separate research achievements, etc.). Examples of such research achievements include freely accessible research data including software and codes, awards, contributions to conferences, keynote lectures, significant research projects, peer review activities, promotion of junior researchers, exhibitions, interactions with society (including citizen science or transdisciplinary activities), science communication, knowledge transfer, licenses, or patents. If available, a persistent identifier or link to each research achievement must be provided.

Annex 3: Career and mentoring plan

The career and mentoring plan must be no longer than 3 pages and be written together with the mentor. The name of the research institute and the mentor must be stated at the beginning of the document. After that, the following content must be addressed using the English headings provided here for this purpose.

- *Qualification/Expertise:* Skills and knowledge that the principal investigator already possesses or intends to acquire (for example, methodological expertise, relevant courses, additional academic activities such as teaching, etc.) in order to successfully implement the proposed project and to achieve the next career level.

- *Career goals:* Long-term and medium-term research and career goals of the principal investigator; contribution of the proposed project to achieving these goals.

- *Research profile:* Contribution of the planned research to establishing an independent research profile of the principal investigator, and a description of this profile.

- *Networking:* Networking opportunities that provide principal investigators with new insights and prospects and help them to increase their visibility in the scientific community and the resources used to do this.

- *Mentoring:* Description of how the mentor will assist the principal investigator in achieving their individual goals and skills development.

- *Interaction between mentor and mentee:* Details on the interaction between the principal investigator and the mentor (for example, how often they meet to discuss topics, monitoring of progress, etc.).

- *Additional mentoring support* (optional): Where applicable, names, their research institutions, and specific roles and expertise of any additional people that perform mentoring duties.

Annex 4 (optional): Collaboration letters

Collaboration letters (each no more than 1 page) from national and international collaboration partners who are named in the project description as being essential for the implementation of the project and whose role is plausibly described

2.2.4 Publication output

The following two separate uploads are required:

- *PI_publication.pdf*: Two publications written by the applicant must be named, documenting that the applicant fulfills the general requirements to apply (see template *PI-publication*). The FWF will base the applicant's eligibility to apply on these publications.

- *Publication_lists.pdf:* A list of all research publications over the last five years[8] (categorized as "quality-assured publications" and "other publications," see section 1.4.1) of the principal investigator and the mentor, in *one* PDF document. This publication list helps the FWF to determine if there are any potential conflicts of interest with reviewers. It will not be forwarded to the reviewers.

2.3 Eligible project-specific costs

If the principal investigator only requests the €45,000 lump sum approved for project-specific costs, then only the cost categories "Personnel costs" (employment contract at a senior postdoc salary, 100% employment) and "Other costs" (project lump sum of €15,000) must be completed in the *Cost breakdown* form for each of the three years of the project. If funds that exceed this lump sum are requested, then the respective amounts must be entered in the appropriate cost categories. Funds may only be requested for the following cost categories: personnel costs, equipment costs, material costs, travel costs (including costs for the presentation of project results at conferences), contracts for work and services, other eligible costs (as specified for stand-alone projects (for details, see Application guidelines for Principal Investigator Projects) as well as costs for coaching and/or professional development (max. €6,000; to be entered under "Other costs" in the *Cost breakdown* form).

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[8]   Publication lists must include: all authors, complete title of the publications, journal, year, and page numbers. For each publication, if available, either a DOI address or another persistent identifier should be indicated; for publications with more than 20 authors, an "et al." citation can be used.

2.4   Resubmitting a previously rejected application

A resubmission is defined as the revision of an application addressing the same or similar research questions as a proposal the FWF has previously rejected, regardless of the program category. If an application is submitted on the same or a very similar research question and if, in the view of the principal investigator, this application is not a resubmission but a completely new project, this must be explained in a separate accompanying letter to the FWF Office. For example, changes in research methods alone are not sufficient for a proposal to qualify as a completely new project. In cases of doubt, the appropriate decision-making bodies of the FWF shall decide.

Resubmissions must show changes from the rejected application. If an application has been rejected for the standardized reason C3, C4 or C5, these changes need to be substantial (based on the comments in the reviews). If no such changes are made, the FWF's decision-making bodies will return the application to the applicant without review.

When resubmitting an application, the following documents must be uploaded:

• An accompanying letter containing an overview of all changes (*Overview_revision*) made in the resubmitted application must be submitted to the FWF. This overview will not be passed on to the reviewers.

• A response to all reviews of the rejected application must be provided, even if one of the reviewers is to be excluded from reviewing the resubmitted application (see section 3.2). This response, consolidated in *one* document, will be forwarded to all reviewers reviewing the resubmission and should address the recommendations and criticisms included in the previous reviews as well as describe the resulting changes made.

While no deadlines for the resubmission of a rejected application apply, the respective application requirements apply. Resubmissions must be submitted as described in section 2.1, i.e. as a separate, new application and not as a supplementary application to the previously rejected proposal.

2.5   File formats, file names, and online forms

Overview of all documents and forms to be submitted:

2.5.1   Required components of an application

Files (to be uploaded):
• *Proposal.pdf* (project description incl. annexes 1-3 and where applicable 4, with PDF bookmarks, at least for the major sections)
• *PI_publication.pdf* (two publications written by the applicant must be named, documenting that the applicant fulfills the general requirements to apply)

- *Publication_lists.pdf* (publication list of principal investigator and mentor for the last 5 years, broken down into "quality assured publications" and "other publications", in one single document)

Forms (to be filled in online):
- *Research institution assignment*
- *Contact* form
- *Application* form
- *Program specific data*
- *Cost breakdown*
- *Academic abstract* in English
- *Co-authors*
- *Other collaborations* (if applicable; for national and international collaboration partners)

2.5.2   File uploads, if applicable

- *Cover_Letter.pdf* (= accompanying letter; optional)
- *Negative_list.pdf* (= reviewers who should be excluded; optional)
- *Follow.pdf* (= result report or final project report of the previous project for follow-up applications; will be forwarded to the reviewers)
- *Overview_revision.pdf* (= for resubmissions, overview of all changes made in the resubmitted application)
- *Revision.pdf* (= for resubmissions, response to all reviews of the previously rejected application)

3   Processing and decision-making

3.1   Submission and requests for changes

All of the documents specified above must be uploaded in full to elane. Once an application has been officially submitted, the research institution and the applicant can make no further changes to the application themselves. All applications are checked for completeness and any formal errors by the FWF Office. The FWF's decision-making bodies reserve the right to return applications without review if they do not meet the FWF's formal requirements. The most common reasons why applications are returned without review are (a) that the principal investigator's publication record does not meet the requirements (see section 1.4.1), (b) that the application does not address specific hypotheses or research questions (see section 2.2.3), and c) that resubmissions have not been sufficiently revised (see section 2.4).

If the FWF Office identifies issues with the application that it considers to be rectifiable, it will notify the research institution and the principal investigator, giving them the opportunity to correct the problems within a reasonable period of time (generally 3 weeks). The requested changes are to be submitted to elane as a supplementary application and approved for submission by the lead research institution if necessary. If the **requested changes** are not

made and submitted as a supplementary application before the specified deadline, the decision-making bodies at the FWF will return the application without review.

Once the review process has begun, no more changes can be made to the application.

3.2 Excluding reviewers

A list of a maximum of 3 potential reviewers who should not be consulted to review the proposal due to a possible conflict of interest can be uploaded as an additional document. The applicant must give reasons why they wish to exclude these reviewers. If the reasons for exclusion are professionally and technically sound, the FWF will generally fulfil the applicant's request to exclude those reviewers from the review process. A detailed description of the FWF's policy on conflicts of interest can be found in the General Principles of the Decision-Making Procedure.

Please note that the FWF does not wish to receive, nor will it consider a list of potential reviewers from applicants.

3.3 Number of reviews required

At least two reviews are required for approval of an application.

3.4 Decision-making process

For detailed information on the decision-making process, the criteria for selecting international reviewers, detailed rules concerning conflicts of interest, and the composition of juries and review panels, please see the General Principles of the Decision-Making Procedure.

The **review process** for ESPRIT usually takes about four to six months. More detailed information is available online on the FWF Dashboard.

When the review process it is completed, the FWF Board considers the reviews and decides whether the proposal should be funded. The FWF aims to award at least half of all ESPRIT projects to female principal investigators: In the case of equal qualifications and equal quality of projects, applications by female principal investigators will be given priority, especially in disciplines in which women are underrepresented at the FWF as principal investigators. In general, the approval rate for projects by female principal investigators must not be less than that for projects by male principal investigators. The lead research institute and the applicant are informed in writing of the FWF's decision.

3.5 Reasons for rejection

The reasons for rejecting an application are assigned to one of five categories (C1–C5) and communicated to the principal investigator and the lead research institution; the principal investigator is also sent anonymized copies of the reviews. A detailed description of the

reasons for rejection can be found in the [General Principles of the Decision-Making Procedure](#).

3.6 Reviewing resubmissions

If the application is a **resubmission** of a previously rejected proposal, the FWF will generally contact those reviewers who provided *constructive* criticism on the previous application. Reviewers who gave entirely positive or negative comments will usually not be contacted for a second review. However, please note that generally all resubmissions are also evaluated by new reviewers.

3.7 Proposal bans

Applications that are rejected for reason C5 will be barred for 12 months (from the date of the official notification of the decision) and cannot be resubmitted during that period.

Applications that have been submitted to the same funding program three times and rejected for reasons C3 or C4 (i.e. the original application and corresponding resubmissions) are also blocked for 12 months (from the date of decision); rejections for reasons C1 or C2 are not included in this total. In principle, only topics are blocked and not applicants or research institutions.

4 Compliance with legal requirements and standards of research integrity

4.1 Legal regulations

Please note that the research institution(s) and all individuals involved in the project are obligated to comply with all legal requirements, safety provisions, and any embargo regulations and sanctions (e.g., Federal Disability Equality Act, Federal Equal Treatment Act, Dual-Use Regulation [EU] 2021/821) that apply for the Principal Investigator Project and obtain all the necessary permits (e.g., from the Ethics Committee, the Animal Testing Commission, the National Heritage Agency, or the relevant foreign authorities).

4.2 Academic integrity

The [Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice](#) of the [Austrian Agency for Research Integrity (ÖAWI)](#) apply.

Where a breach of these standards is suspected, the ombud of the respective research institution is responsible for investigating the issue. Research institutions are required to report any cases of suspected serious violations of the standards to the ÖAWI. The FWF reserves the right to suspend, in part or in whole, any procedures related to applications or ongoing projects until this check or investigation has been concluded. For more detailed

information, see [FWF procedure in cases of suspected violation of the standards of good research practice](#).

5 Data protection and publication of project data and results

5.1 Data protection

Pursuant to Art. 6 (1) item a of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), in conjunction with § 2g of the Austrian Research Organization Act (*Forschungsorganisations-gesetz*, FOG), the FWF processes and publishes personal data (e.g. the title of the submitted project, research institution, academic abstract, PR summaries) necessary for the administration of the funding by the FWF – while safeguarding business and trade secrets – for the purposes of research policy (e.g., presentation of the development of basic research in Austria, economic analyses, funding impact reports, etc.) and for public relations work (publication of excerpts in the FWF annual report, on the FWF website, in press releases, media collaborations, etc.). If necessary, these data are also transmitted to third parties (e.g., for the preparation of research policy studies, on the basis of supervisory duties, in particular §§ 2d and 3a of the Research and Technology Funding Act [*Forschungs- und Technologie-förderungsgesetz*, FTFG], to bodies and agents of the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and, in particular, pursuant to § 3 [2], § 4 [1], and § 13 [3] of the Court of Audit Act 1948 [*Rechnungshofgesetz* 1948 RHG], to the Austrian Court of Audit as well as to bodies and institutions of the European Union in accordance with European legal provisions). Transmission of data is also based on § 6 (1) item c of the GDPR in conjunction with § 2g of the FOG.

Further information on the data privacy rights of the applicant or applying research institution as well as the contact details of the FWF's data protection officers is available [here](#).

5.2 Publication of project data and results

Please note that if a grant is awarded, a PR summary in German and English will be published on the FWF website, as well as the grant amount and later, PR summaries of the project's findings in German and English. Summaries must be submitted to the FWF when the grant agreement is returned. The principal investigator must ensure that these texts are worded in such a way that legitimate interests of secrecy for reasons of national defense and patent law are safeguarded and business secrets are protected appropriately. Information on writing PR texts can be found [on the FWF website.](#)

In addition, the FWF requires a data management plan (DMP) for all approved projects. This plan should also be sent to the FWF when returning the grant agreement. The template for the DMP can be viewed and downloaded [on the FWF website](#).

In the case of approved ESPRIT projects, a signed declaration of support from the proposed mentor must also be submitted to the FWF together with the funding agreement and the DMP.

The guidelines specified in the grant agreement on acknowledging the FWF as the funding institution and the FWF's Open-Access Policy apply for any publication of project results (e.g., academic publications, research data, conference contributions, and media reports).

6 Appendix: Notes and questions for reviewers in the ESPRIT program[9]

The FWF actively supports equal opportunities and equal treatment in all of its programs. The review of an application must not put applicants at a disadvantage for non-research-related reasons such as age, gender, etc. For example, instead of considering the applicant's actual age, the review process should focus on how the length of the individual's research career corresponds to their research achievements to date.

Our commitment to equal opportunities also means considering breaks or delays in applicants' research careers (e.g., due to parental leave; long-term or chronic illness; disability; caring responsibilities; etc.), which may have led to publication gaps, atypical career paths, or limited international research experience. Please also see our information for reviewers on underlying unconscious bias in the decision-making process.

Only the ten most important academic publications and the ten most important additional research achievements of the applicant are to be considered when evaluating the application. As a signatory to the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment, the FWF also emphasizes that, in assessing research performance, reviewers should refrain from using metrics such as journal impact factors, article influence scores, or the h-index.

Please review the current proposal[10] based on the following eight assessment criteria:
1) innovation and novelty, 2) quality of the proposed research, 3) approach and feasibility, 4) principal investigator's qualifications, 5) ethics, sex and gender aspects, 6) contribution to career development and suitability of the mentor, 7) suitability of the research institute, and 8) overall evaluation. For each of these criteria except 5) we ask you for both written comments and a rating on a scale from "outstanding" to "poor". Please be aware, however, that the FWF's funding decision will be based primarily on reviewers' written assessments rather than the ratings assigned.

Please keep in mind that sections 1 and 2 will be forwarded to the applicant in in full and in anonymous form. If the proposal is approved, the research institution may have access to the anonymized reviews submitted to the applicant.

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[9] Further information can be found on our website: FWF's mission statement and values or Application Guidelines for the ESPRIT Program.

[10] The application must meet the FWF's formal requirements Please bear these in mind when writing your review. (Key formal requirements: 20 pages max. for the project description including figures and tables; 5 pages max. for the list of references; 3 pages max. for each academic CV, including a description of previous research achievements and the ten most important publications. For further details see Application Guidelines for the ESPRIT Program)

Section 1:

1. Innovation and novelty

Is the proposed research innovative? Does it make an original contribution to its field?

2. Quality of the proposed research

Are the research questions formulated clearly? Are they timely, challenging, and likely to lead to relevant insights?

3. Approach and feasibility

Is the research design well-conceived, clearly formulated, and suitable for answering the research question(s)? Is there a well-organized work plan? Have the methods been chosen well and does the proposal describe them in sufficient detail?

4. Qualifications of the principal investigator

How well is the principal investigator qualified to carry out the proposed research? How would you assess the academic qualifications of the principal investigator? In evaluating the principal investigator's qualifications, please consider their career stage, taking into account unusual career paths and circumstances that may have slowed down their progress (e.g., parental leave, long-term or chronic illness, disability, caring responsibilities).

5. Ethics, sex and gender

Ethics: Have ethical considerations been addressed satisfactorily?

Sex-specific and gender-related aspects: Applicants are required to address any relevant sex-specific and/or gender-related elements inherent in research questions and/or research design. Please assess whether the treatment of these components is adequate.

6. Contribution of the research project to the career development of the principal investigator and the suitability of the mentor and the planned career development measures for increasing the principal investigator's long-term career prospects

Does the research project contribute to the principal investigator developing an independent research profile? How important is the research project for continuing to develop the principal investigator's skills? Is the mentor qualified to assist the principal investigator's career? Are the planned measures (in terms of mentoring, networking, acquisition of skills, etc.) described in a plausible manner and can they be expected to contribute to the principal investigator's career development?

7. Suitability of the research institute for implementing the planned project and the project's contribution to enhancing the research institute (expected added value)

Can the principal investigator turn to the research institute (or, where applicable, to the cooperation partners) for expertise on the respective subject area? Is the project integrated into the activities of the research institute and does the project contribute to enhancing the research institute?

8. Overall evaluation

What is your overall impression of the project proposal? Specifically, what would you consider its key strengths and weaknesses? Please give reasons for your answers, taking as much space as you need.

Section 2: Optional recommendations for the applicant

If you are in favor of the project being funded, you may want to add to the formal assessment in section 1 by making further and perhaps more informal comments or suggestions here. However, please note that these remarks, too, may also have an impact on the FWF's funding decision, especially if they amount to substantive criticism of the project.

Section 3: Confidential remarks to the FWF

Please use this space to make any comments that you do not want submitted to the applicant. Feel free to also give us feedback about the evaluation process and your interactions with us.